Module 5 Crime, Criminal, Criminology and Juvenile Delinquency

Lecture 32

Types of Juvenile Delinquency

Types of juvenile delinquency

Delinquency exhibits a variety of styles of conduct or forms of behavior. Each of the patterns has its own social context, the causes are alleged to bring it about, and the forms of prevention or treatment most often suggested as appropriate for the pattern in question. Howard Becker (1966) has referred to following four types of delinquencies:

Individual Delinquency

This refers to delinquency in which only one individual is involved in committing a delinquent act and its cause is located within the individual delinquent. Most of the explanations of this delinquent behavior come from psychiatrists. Their argument is that delinquency is caused by the psychological problems stemming primarily from defective/faulty/pathological family interaction patterns.

Group-Supported Delinquency

In this type, the delinquencies are committed in companionship with others and the cause is located not in the personality of the individual or in the delinquent’s family but in the culture of the individual’s home and neighborhood.

Organized Delinquency

This type of delinquency refers to delinquencies that are committed by developing formally organized groups. These delinquencies were analyzed in the United States in the 1950s and the concept of ‘delinquent sub-culture’ was developed. This concept refers to the set of values and norms that guide the behavior of group members encourage the commission of delinquencies, award status on the basis of such acts and specify typical relationships to person who fall outside the groupings governed by group norms.
Situational Delinquency

The above three types of delinquencies have one thing in common. In all of them, delinquency is viewed as having deep roots. In individual delinquency, the root of delinquency lies primarily within individual. In group-supported delinquency and organized delinquencies the roots lie in the structure of the society with emphasis either on the ecological areas where delinquency prevails or the systematic way in which social structure places some individuals in a poor position to compete for success. The situational delinquency provides a different perspective. Here the assumption is that delinquency is not deeply rooted, and motives for delinquency and means for controlling it are often relatively simple. A young man indulges in a delinquent act without having a deep commitment to delinquency because of less developed impulse control or because of lesser reinforcement of family restraints and because he has relatively little to lose even if caught.

Factors of Juvenile Delinquency

What causes juvenile delinquency or adult crime? There is no simple or straightforward answer available. Although criminal behaviour sometimes has its roots in juvenile delinquency, many juvenile delinquents do not become criminals as adults. Further, many criminals have no prior history of juvenile delinquency. However, the range of offences, motivations and associated causative factors are much the same in both delinquency and crime and it may be appropriate to discuss them together. What impels some people, children, women and men to break social sanction or any law? Efforts have been made by a number of writers and researchers to understand the factors involved and they have discovered many: physical, emotional, psychological and environmental. It has not been possible to assign a single universal source nor even two or three. Crime flows out of a wide variety of sources and usually from a multiplicity of alternative and converging influences. Without contending that they will inevitably cause delinquency or crime, it is now accepted that certain conditions are more favourable to this causation than others. For example, physical deformity, mental imbalance, mental deficiency, emotional insecurity, a slum environmental stimulation to crime, etc., are obviously more
favourable to anti-social behaviour than their opposites. It is also true that any or all of these unfavourable conditions will not inevitably drive a given person to commit a crime in all circumstances. It is true that all seemingly favourable circumstances are no insurance against a person committing a crime. Hidden factors that tip the scale either way can never be eliminated from specific situations by all the theories of causation in the world. In this sort of perplexing situation then, what we can say, at best, is that the area of unknown regarding human behaviour is quite substantial though some personal factors and some common social and economic conditions go hand in hand with the committing of crime and delinquency. And the impact of these factors, and their varying combinations, differ greatly from one individual to another. In some cases the factors responsible may be more personal than environmental, whereas in other cases the reverse may be true.

**Innate and Environmental Factors**

Let us now discuss the innate characteristics and environmental factors in some detail. Personal pathology consisting of physical factors like poor health, chronic diseases, physical deformities may cause an inferiority complex and impel the individual to seek for short-cuts to compete in this competitive world. Mental factors like low intelligence, neurotic or psychotic disorders may lead to exploitation or compulsive actions or deviant sexual gratification. There is the possibility of prolonged emotional and social withdrawal, the frustration culminating in an outburst of violent behaviour. The emotionally mature individual is one who has learned to control her/his emotions effectively, and who lives at peace with himself and in harmony with the standards of conduct which are acceptable to the group. Many authorities believe that delinquency and criminality are the result of serious emotional imbalance or conflicts in personalities of individuals. They are at odds with the values and mores of their groups and typically offend the sensibilities of those closest to them. Thus, from the psychological point of view, individual exhibits a distorted personality; his personal whims are largely responsible for his antisocial behaviour and he is alienated from those in his immediate social environment.
**Reality Versus Fantasy:** Stated somewhat differently, since few persons have a completely satisfactory set of experiences from birth onward, or find life entirely to their liking in adulthood, the great majority of normal human beings create for themselves a realm of fantasy in which they realise aspirations denied to them in actual life. But in all these normal cases reality occupies the leading role in their life interests and activities. On the other hand, those with emotional disturbances are unable to face reality, resulting in mental conflicts. Their life experiences, childhood onwards, might have been such that they have created mental reaction patterns that make it very difficult for them to meet adult responsibilities. They may have suffered from insecurity, rejection, severe resentment, harsh living conditions, professional failures, and a large number of other unfortunate experiences. This may make it extremely difficult for them to face realities of life and they get into conflict with law. Physical abnormalities as mentioned earlier and many personality problems of children and adults are developed by physical handicaps or other such abnormalities. Short stature, skin blemishes, oversised ears, obesity, to refer to a few, are likely to cause serious personality or emotional difficulties in social relationships among those afflicted. They are usually avoided in social contacts and find themselves at a disadvantage in marriage opportunities, in securing employment, and in numerous other ways. The pent-up resentment may become acute and compensatory behaviour develops, in such a manner that various forms of alienation result. A youth may compensate for his feeling of inferiority by becoming a daring robber; one may get very angry and hit back his actual or imaginary tormentors. But we must not forget, however, that quite a majority of persons thus afflicted make an adequate adjustment in their world. This is particularly true of those who have grown through childhood with a set of understanding parents and friends who have not rejected them.

**Health and Disease:** As regards poor health or chronic diseases, we do experience that persons who are ill (or fatigued, for that matter) often are irritable, unreasonable, and less controlled in their behaviour than usual. Feeble minded persons and probably more easily led to crime and delinquency because they have less ability to think critically and very often cannot make satisfactory decisions and govern their conduct accordingly. Any mental disease condition which alters the individual’s judgement or capacity for self-
restraint will affect his behavior which may take absurd, dangerous, or antisocial directions. Sex murders, arson, compulsive thieving (kleptomania) are instances of crimes which involve a neurotic element.

**Environmental Factors in the Family**

There can no doubt be personal factors in every delinquency or crime situation in which an individual disobeys a law. But there are also social, economic and community factors commonly termed as environmental factors, which are important in stimulating antisocial activity. We usually think of the environment as merely the more apparent factors in the life of an individual—his neighborhood, the house he lives in, his family life, his school or workplace, and the interactions he has with his friends. These are of course part of the environment. But as a scientific concept, environment must include every stimulus that impinges on the individual’s structure from the moment of conception—the moment the new life begins. The environment is represented by every possible interaction between the individual and every other individual with whom he comes in contact. His reading, the motion pictures (even posters!), the radio, television—all are a potent part of the environment.

**The Family:** We may discuss environmental factors in two parts—‘within the family’ and outside the family’. Of course, these two cannot be put into separate compartment since there is a constant interplay among their influences on each other, on the one hand, and on the physical, mental and emotional states of the individual, on the other. Family is the first crucial group in the life of the child. No one can say at birth that a child will inevitably become a delinquent nor can it be said that it will inevitably remain a law-abiding individual. Family is the first agency to nurture a child’s social and personal growth. Within the family lie tremendous forces for producing or presenting antisocial behaviour. This is because it has almost exclusive contact with the child during the period of greatest dependency, which lasts several years. From a warm, loving, stable family, the child learns that people are friendly, worth knowing, and can be depended upon. When a family is cold, rejecting, or neglectful, the child learns distrust, hostility, or hatred of people. ‘Under-the-roof’ family situation and relationships can have many ‘interacting’ aspects. These are involved in the formation of a cumulative atmosphere, which may
affect the behaviour of the child one way or the other. Take for example the broken home, which may have been caused by death, desertion, or divorce/separation. Mother and father are generally considered two wheels of a family cart which cannot move smoothly when either of them is removed or relations between them are damaged. There is a strong belief that broken family tends to rear children with sick personalities. Sick personalities have unusual difficulty confirming to social rules. A number of investigators have pointed towards the high incidence of structural breaks in the family backgrounds of delinquent youths.

**Structural Breaks in the Family:** Structural break in the family, except in case of death, is always seen to be receded by daily parental quarrels. Much tension and disruption of peaceful living have quite a traumatic effect on the children. In some circumstances, the break in the family may, at times, improve the home atmosphere. Thus, the interpersonal conditions of family relationships are very important. In disharmonious families, children too often get ‘pushed’ from home because of these disturbances. They have to seek outside contacts for resolving feelings of insecurity and frustration, rather than being ‘pulled’ by outside attractions. Through the years, perhaps, one of the most frequently heard causes of delinquency and crime is parental inadequacy, in their role of bringing up children. Socialisation is the process through which the child becomes aware of the basic values of his society and acquires the attitudes characteristic of it. Early family training influences strongly the inculcation of these values. The growing child must learn which action is permitted, which prohibited, and why. It must learn how to get along with others, children and adults. Depending upon the patterns of disciplining and guiding an also the role models at home, the child will learn to handle the pressures and responsibilities of growing up inside and outside the home. Mother nature, not doubt, has helped a lot by providing, in most instances, an affectionate bond between parents and the child. However affection alone is not enough to influence the conduct of children in a wholesome way. Affection has to be backed up by consistent control and appropriate disciplining efforts. When the parents are inconsistent in behaviour the child feels very insecure. This is because he or she never knows how his parents are going to react to what he does. He or She finds that they are at times angry, sometimes interested and other
times disinterested, he or she is completely confused. His or Her problems are still more when each parent reacts in a completely contradictory manner, or when one condones, and the other punishes with undue harshness.

**Child Care and Delinquency:** Working mothers have often been blamed on the assumption that a young child needs the mother’s constant attention to assure its proper emotional and physical development. This becomes very difficult when she is away for a substantial part of the day and returns with nervous and physical exhaustion. Additionally, in adolescent years when supervision becomes more essential, maternal employment reduces its effectively thereby unduly exposing them to unhealthy influences. However, the evidence available does not conclusively show significant relationship between delinquency and the mother being at work. What is important is not the employment of the mother but the lack of supervision. If the mother remains at home but does not keep track of her child he/she is far more likely to become delinquent than if she is away but has made arrangement for supervision by an acceptable substitute. Actually, a working mother’s economic contribution can be an integrating and stabilizing influence in the family. It may mean a desire for providing greater family security, continued education of children, a summer vacation, or any of a number of things thought to be of benefit to all members of the family.

**Poverty in the Family:** Poverty in the family has been another popular explanation advanced as a cause of unsocial conduct. It is true that in a great majority of apprehended children, the economic status of the family has always been found to be low. There are far more honest than dishonest poor people. Conditions of affluence are no sure guarantee against law violations by youth as well as by adults. Had that been so, the higher standard of living in the western world should have reduced their delinquency and crime rates. It has not only not reduced them but increased them! Paradoxically, the trend towards increasing equality in the distribution of consumer goods generates expectations of further equality. And when expectations are raising faster than the standard of living, the greater availability of consumer goods makes for greater, dissatisfaction. In other words, many crimes may be traced to economic causes. However, it is not correct that most of those
who committed the offence were driven to do it by hunger. It is the envy and ambition rather than hunger and cold that stimulate many petty crimes, in the same way that greed urges on the big-time criminals. It is not the lack of clothing, but expensive clothing that tempts hundreds of girls to become call girls. Actually, it is not always the poverty but the contrast that is the disturbing element.

**Social Environment**

Under the above heading we will briefly consider three main factors:

**Slum Neighbourhoods:** With many people flocking to towns and cities housing has become a problem. Slums have grown to accommodate those who were shelterless, unemployed, low salaried, etc. Crime rates are higher in these deprived sections because it is here that life is not disorganised. There are extra pressures to make a living. People in slums also want the same good things that they see others enjoying. They find that they cannot get them honestly, often because of lack of education or opportunity. This situation creates frustration and tensions, and some of them develop an indifference to law, and do not see the necessity of obeying it. Many times crime becomes an accepted way of life, an alternative to the honest work which seems unavailable or out of reach, although it may be reorganised as desireable and preferable. They are also exposed to undesirable models around, those crooks who make good money through illegal means and appear respected in the locality, nonetheless. Crime and delinquency thus become attractive, but one again we an only see an indirect relationship. Thousands of people living in substandard homes do manage somehow to remain away from unlawful activities.

**Earning and Schooling:** Besides equipping the child to learn the skills to later earn a living, education means development of personality. Through education the child is supposed to be introduced to ideals and higher types of men who can cater to refinement and broader mental outlook. Generally speaking, middle-class families place a high value on ambition, on getting ahead. Academic achievement and the acquisition of skills that have long-range economic pay-offs are highly appreciated. They socialise their children to struggle hard, exercise self-control and postpone gratifications, and to plan for the
future. In the poor class family children are withdrawn from school because family needs the economic aid of the child. He or she may also be needed to take care of the siblings in the absence of the mother while on work. Dropping out may mean more leisure. More free time may mean diminishing adult supervision as well as increased scope for developing undesirable associates.

**Negative Impact of Mass Media:** There is a growing concern these days that the mass media which undoubtedly inform, educate and entertain have also become a source of contamination. It is frequently alleged that newspapers, film magazines, and comics, radio television and movies have been exerting an unhealthy influence, particularly on children. Sensational reports of criminal activity in newspapers by detailing the modus operandi (i.e., types and techniques), can affect readers in two different and dangerous ways. It may affect some highly suggestible persons, among whom are many young people, to commit similar crimes. Or it may create an attitude of indifference to law and asorder through the constant repetition and exaggeration of the details of the crimes. Motion pictures dealing with rime quite often show that it is easy to lie without working legitimately. They show that crime is exiting, even though it may not pay in the long run. They indicate that there are methods of erading the law, at least in the early parts of the film. Young girls find from many movies that love can be thrilling, that good clothes make the woman. There are many scenes which are titillating sexually. Television has grown in importance and is reaching more and more home. Not that T.V. is objected to wholesale—the prime culprits are those films and programmes loaded with vice. Such violence or vulgarity are allegedly said to induce viewers to raping, prostitution, robbery, assault or murder. In a country like India where literacy rate is quite low, the impact of radio on general attitude and approaches to behaviour can be much more potent than the published material. However, what is objected to in radio programmes are generally the crime dramas and advertising of films with violence themes, especially the sponsored programmes by producer/distributors. Many authorities, believe that mass media has been made too much of a scapegoat for the deteriorating delinquency and crime problems. Occasionally a person states that he got the idea for a crime from a newspaper account of the activities of another criminal. But the publicity given to the modus operandi of the
criminal may make the public more aware of the techniques of such activities because sooner or later police do catch the offender. About the radio, television and films it is contended that millions of people, both young and not so young, listen or view these programmes. It would be absurd to state that most of them are adversely affected. It will mostly depend on the type of person who is listening or viewing their output. Stable people, juveniles and adults, will be little affected since such influence is transient. The unstable and socially maladjusted may be somewhat affected. However, because of this unidentifiable segment of population harsh controls should not be placed on the mass media. Mass communication media have become quite important in the present times for providing information and education as well as entertainment. The freedom of expression is quite a sensitive subject for democracies.

**Poverty and Low Income:** The vast majority of those arrested and convicted belong to poor economic status. We must bear in mind that they have no one to come between them—the police and courts, when the law is broken. They lack resources and the police as well as other law enforcing authorities are more severe on them. In actual terms the administrative processes of law enforcement are seen to be quite favourable to person in economic comfort. If two persons on different economic levels, have committed the same offence, the one on the lower level is more likely to be arrested, and convicted. It will have to be accepted that the economic factors are quite important. Poverty can engender antisocial activities in many indirect ways. Unsatisfactory human relations have been frequently seen to emanate from destitution and poverty. The feelings of inadequacy, and emotional insecurity play their part upon the inner life of potential offenders. Poverty does cause undernourishment and poor physical health which, in turn, may lead to a lowered mental resistance to temptation. Poverty-stricken families have very little choice in the selection of residential locality. Usually their living conditions are congested, playgrounds are either few or altogether absent. Here the living space is too small to afford the comfort and privacy required for the development of self-respecting personalities. Evidently, because of poverty and poor circumstances, the options of the children get severely limited. In families, generally larger than the average, with little living space and inadequate facilities, the children are driven to seek their recreations on
the streets. The daily budgeting battle, often giving rise to frayed tempers between husband and wife, when there is very little money to provide for the minimum basic necessities of food, clothing, education, etc., impose extraordinary strains on the family. The parents in such situations can take little or no interest in their children, although they have affection for them. Further, because of lack of money, very often the reasonable demands of school going children are mocked at and education suffers. However, as mentioned earlier, we cannot say that environment of poverty makes everyone delinquent or criminal since there are plenty of people who come from such surroundings and remain law-abiding. But poverty does different things to different people. For some its pressures can be among the important causes of antisocial behavior.

References
